

**The relationship between public service motivation and public  
service related behavior in a context of diverse goals and value  
conflicts**

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**Abstract**

*The public service motivation (PSM) literature assumes that PSM affects performance. However, our knowledge about the effects of PSM on daily behavior is limited and even less is known about the possibility that the relationship between PSM and behavioral consequences might not be that simple and direct, but influenced by contextual factors. This paper<sup>1</sup> aims to explicate the mechanisms behind the PSM-behavior relationship and introduces a theoretical model which takes the unique motivational context of public organizations into account. Two important characteristics of this context are discussed, being (public) value conflicts and procedural constraints. In detail, this paper combines insights from motivational theories (goal-setting theory and theory on person-organization fit) with literature on conflicting (public) values to outline a theoretical model which explains how and under which condition PSM affects behavior. Finally, the theoretical model is illustrated in a short reference to the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority.*

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## **1. Introduction**

‘In public service organizations, public service motivation is positively related to individual performance (p. 370)’. By now, this proposition by Perry and Wise (1990) belongs to the most fundamental assumptions about public service motivation (PSM) (Brewer, 2004; Brewer & Selden, 2000; Francois, 2000; Perry, 2000, Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). According to the authors (Perry & Wise, 1990), individuals perform well because they are working to provide services that they perceive as meaningful.

There are many different definitions of PSM. For example, Rainey and Steinbauer (1999) address PSM as ‘a general, altruistic motivation to serve the interest of a community of people, a state, a nation or humankind’ (p. 23). Vandenabeele’s (2007) definition of PSM goes a step further; it refers to the origin of PSM, too. According to the author, PSM is ‘the belief, the values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate’ (p. 549).

However, the underlying element of all definitions of PSM is ‘serving the public good’. This reflects the predominant assumption in the literature that PSM affects behavior which, in turn, influences performance. Even though behavior and performance are certainly not the same, to simplify matters, we assume a close relationship between the two concepts while focusing on individual behavior.

Yet, there are also voices that call to consider the possibility that the relationship between PSM and behavior is more complex than initially expected. Already more than 10 years ago, Brewer and Selden (1998) proposed that ‘the relationship between PSM and prosocial behavior may be moderated by situational factors such as red tape or other characteristics of the organization or service area’ (p. 412). More recently, Perry et al. (2010) recognize ‘that the effects of public service motivation are more nuanced than Perry and Wise [originally] projected’ (p. 10). Next to this, Vandenabeele (2008) conditions organizational performance to a fit between the organization and the employee. In detail, he proposes that (highly public service motivated) employees only perform certain behaviors if the institutions in which they operate allow for the behaviors to be performed. Similarly, Wright and Pandey (2008)

criticize that studies investigate the consequences of PSM under the assumption that public organizations always provide sufficient opportunities to satisfy the motivation of their employees to serve the public. The authors argue that just because public agencies have the possibility to provide individuals with the opportunities to satisfy PSM, there is no guaranty that they always do so. For instance, a highly public service motivated doctor might become frustrated by the fact that his or her supervisor pushes to do lots of administrative work in order to comply to national health care policies and therefore show no, or only reduced, public service related behavior. In line with this, Wright and Christensen (2007) concluded that instead of asking whether PSM affects employees' attraction and retention, perhaps it might be more appropriate to ask when and under what conditions PSM affects employees' behavior.

This brief review of the literature illustrates that we need to be aware of the possibility that the relationship between PSM and behavior might not be that simple and direct as originally suggested by Perry and Wise in 1990. Instead, it may be assumed that this relationship is influenced by contextual factors. For this reason, this paper aims to enrich the knowledge about the PSM-behavior relationship by explicating the mechanisms behind this relationship and introducing a theoretical model which takes the unique motivational context of public organizations into account.

This knowledge is highly relevant for HR (human resource) professionals because it sheds light on the question whether it makes sense to promote PSM directly by specific HR instruments. Or might it be of greater use to focus on situational circumstances in which PSM is enacted?

In the first place, empirical studies on PSM and performance are briefly reviewed. Second, theoretical and methodological limitations of the predisposition 'PSM is positively related to performance' are discussed. Third, the unique context for motivation in public organizations is described. Fourth, psychological theories (t.i., the goal-setting theory and theory on person-environment fit) are used to introduce a new model which integrates the situational circumstances to explain the behavioral consequences of PSM. Finally, this model is illustrated by means of a practical case, namely the case of Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority.

## **2. Empirical evidence of the PSM-performance relationship**

In the public sector, the number of empirical studies supporting the PSM-performance relationship is limited (Brewer, 2008; Bright, 2008; Wright & Pandey, 2008) just like research focusing on the relationship between PSM and (daily work) behaviors (Andersen & Serritlew, 2009). This fact is likely to be explained by the methodological difficulties of these concepts, which will be discussed in the next section.

Alonso and Lewis (2001), Frank and Lewis (2004), Leisink and Steijn (2009), Lewis and Frank (2002), Naff and Crum (1999), and Vanadenabeele (2009) investigated the relationship between PSM and individual performance directly. While the results of the first three studies supported the PSM-performance relationship, the results of the latter were negative or mixed.

There is also a limited number of studies which researched the relationship between PSM and performance at an organizational level of analysis. In 2000, Brewer and Selden reported that PSM might be a moderately important predictor of organizational performance. Kim's (2005) study, which was build upon Brewer and Selden (2000), supported these research findings in general.

Other studies investigated the relationship between PSM and behaviors. For instance, Brewer and Selden (1998) found a relationship between PSM and whistle blowing. Naff and Crum (1999) were able to demonstrate that there is a relationship between PSM and thoughts about quitting to work for the government, while Bright (2008) figured out that PSM had no significant relationship with turnover intentions when controlling for person-organization fit. Similarly, Lewis and Frank (2002) and Leisink and Steijn (2008) documented a positive relationship between PSM and selecting the government as an employer of choice, whereas Lui et al. (2011) claimed that only one dimension of PSM (namely the dimension self-sacrifice) relates to the choice of employment sector. Finally, Andersen and colleagues investigated the relationship between PSM and daily work behaviors (Andersen, 2009; Andersen & Serritzlew, 2009). Again, the findings were not straightforward. Andersen and Serritzlew (2009) reported that only two out of four dimensions of PSM affect work related behavior. Furthermore, Andersen's (2009) results indicated that professional norms are a stronger predictor of work behavior than public service motivation.

### **3. Methodological limitations of the PSM-performance relationship**

In spite of the fact that there is some data supporting the positive impact of PSM on performance, the results have to be interpreted with caution. There is no doubt in the literature that performance is extremely hard to measure, as it is affected by a great array of factors (Boyne, 2003; Brewer, 2004; Brewer & Selden 1998; Kim, 2006). The same is true for the actual behavior of the providers of public services (Andersen & Serritzlew, 2009). In order to overcome these difficulties, the existing literature predominantly relies on self-reported performance and behavior measurements, despite its numerous shortcomings like the possibility of memory lapses, judgmental errors, socially desirable answers and common source bias. Andersen and Serritlew (2009) tried to eliminate these shortcomings by identifying a public service which allows for being measured directly. In detail, they operationalized performance as the registered data concerning the share of services to disabled patients in health care services.

Moreover, empirical studies about PSM are also challenged by disunity concerning the operationalization of the PSM-construct (Wright, 2008). For example, Brewer and Selden (1998) measured PSM by items referring to job security and public interest, while Crewson (1997) and Houston (2000) based the PSM measurement on Deci's (1975) framework of intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation. Next to this, there are a great number of authors who used a scaled-down version of Perry's 24-item measurement instrument to measure PSM (Alonso & Lewis, 2001; Andersen & Serritlew, 2009; Brewer & Selden, 2000; Coursey & Pandey, 2007; Leisink & Steijn, 2009; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007; Naff & Crum, 1999; Vandenabeele, 2008; Wright & Pandey, 2008) and, there are studies that measure PSM by interfering it directly from employee behavior (Brewer, 2003; Houston, 2006).

This diversity in operational definitions is likely to come along with serious ramifications for research achievements and interpretations. It limits the possibility to build upon previous findings (Wright, 2008) and to make comparisons across different cultures (Kim & Vandenabeele, 2010). Furthermore, interfering PSM directly from behavior introduces the possibility of 'running around in circles'. By doing so, a correlation between PSM and behavior becomes nothing more than a logical consequence.

#### 4. Theoretical problems of the PSM-performance relationship

In his conceptual model of PSM, Vandenabeele (2008) differentiates between public values and PSM. According to the author, the value patterns in which public servants are embedded (the institutions) 'might act in a motivational manner and thus provide us with information about the content of PSM' (p. 57). Through the process of socialization, public values are internalized (Vandenabeele, 2008; Perry & Vandenabeele, 2008). In other words, when public values have become part of the own personality, they serve as motives of public service related behavior.

However, if we take a closer look at Vandenabeele's definition of PSM (as indicated earlier, PSM is defined by Vandenabeele as the belief, the values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate), the line between the two concepts (PSM and public values) is blurred. Vandenabeele is not clear about whether PSM is a motivational, attitudinal, behavioral force or maybe even a value. This cloudiness can be found in the PSM-scale, too. The existing measurement instrument, contains items referring to: *personal behaviours* ('I voluntarily and unselfishly contribute to my community'), *attitudes* ('I do not care much about politicians'), *implicit values* ('It is important that public servants account for all costs they make (accountability)'), and *explicit values* ('Serving the public interest is an important drive in my daily life at work or outside work'). In consistency with Vandenabeele, Maesschalck, Van der Wal and Huberts (2008) emphasize the cloudiness of the two concepts 'values' and 'motivation'. The authors point out that even though the concepts seem quite different from a conceptual point of view, they are interrelated and likewise important for behavior (p.159).

Yet, unlike the authors mentioned above, most scholars treat motivation and values as separated concepts (Rainey, Koehler & Jung, 2008). According to Rainey, Koehler and Jung (2008), having a value is not the same as exerting effort to fulfill it. For instance, we may have internalized the public value 'equity' but may appear not to be motivated (enough) to realize the value. Similarly, we might be motivated to do something we do not really value. Equalizing public values and motivation as motives for the production of public services leaves no room for the possibility that

public values (even though they are internalized) do not automatically lead to actual behavior (see also Rutgers & Steen, 2010).

The same is true for the relationship between motivation and performance. According to Leisink and Steijn (2009), 'motivation as such is not sufficient because there are [also] other factors that influence job performance such as lack of employee abilities (perhaps because of insufficient training) or lack of opportunities to perform due to lack of appropriate (technical) equipment or information' (p.39).

For this reason, we propose that (public) values are not always the only motives that motivate employees to engage, or not to engage, in public service related behavior. Next to this, behavior depends on other factors as well. These thoughts are consistent with the idea described above that the relationship between PSM and behavioral consequences might not be that straightforward as originally stated, but might be more elaborated and influenced by the context. Therefore, additional theories are needed that include situational circumstances in the analysis of the relationship between PSM and behavior.

Summing up, the few existing studies of the PSM- performance relationship are characterized by serious theoretical and methodological problems. From a methodologically point of view, both the measures of performance and PSM may be considered problematic. Theoretically, it can be criticized that the line between PSM and public values is blurred and that the potential existence of contextual factors influencing their relationship with behavior is overlooked. In the next sections, we will analyze the context of public organizations that we consider to be relevant for the expression of PSM in daily practice.

## **5. The unique motivational context of public organizations**

The context for motivation in public organizations is unique and highly complex (Perry & Porter, 1982, Rainey, 2009). In the following, two important characteristics of this context, that may influence the relationship between PSM and public service related behavior, will be discussed, namely (public) value conflicts and procedural constraints.

### *Conflicting public values*

A commonly held distinction between public and private organizations is that public ones are in charge of the promotion of the public interest (Appleby 1952; Bozeman, 2007; Flathman, 1966) and publicly financed (Rainey, 2009). Bozeman (2007) refers to the public interest as an ideal. This implies that the public interest is an encompassing and elusive term. According to the author, there is little agreement about the meaning of public interest. Put it differently, there is no such thing as ‘the one and only public interest’, but everybody has his own ‘public interest’. This fact might explain why different stakeholders (e.g. external authorities, media, and interest groups, citizens) of public organizations demand from public servants to comply with different public values such as effectiveness, timeliness, reliability, reasonableness, and efficiency (For an extensive inventory of public values see Jorgensen & Bozeman, 2007.) In other words, work in the public sector is characterized by situations where one element of the political system emphasizes some criteria more vigorously than others do (Pitt & Smith, 1981). This can increase value conflicts for public servants, because different authorities handle different definitions of public interest, and in turn focus on different public values (Rainey, 2009). For instance, the effort to increase accountability and transparency by publishing annual reports clashes with the value efficiency.

Vandenabeele and colleagues regard public values as the building blocks of PSM (Perry & Vandenabeele, 2008; Vandenabeele & Hondeghem, 2004; Vandenabeele, 2007). Interestingly, the authors pay no attention to the question what happens when public values are conflicting. Does the level of PSM decrease directly? Or are the behavioral consequences of PSM altered? For example, what happens if a highly public service motivated school teacher, who simultaneously values (or has internalized) equal treatment of all pupils and protection and encouragement of disadvantaged children, is confronted with a situation that requires him/her to emphasize one of the public values while dismissing the other one? After all, it is not possible to give private lessons to all pupils at the same time. In the following section, we will contribute to this discussion by explaining the effects of value conflicts on the expression of PSM theoretically.



### *Procedural constraints*

Another commonly cited and empirically supported difference between public and private organizations is that public organizations have more red tape (or procedural constraints) (Baldwin, 1990; Bozeman, Reed & Scott, 1992, Bozeman & Bretschneider, 1994; Rainey, Pandey & Bozeman, 1995) which can be defined as ‘rules, regulations, and procedures that remain in force and entail a compliance burden for the organization but have efficiency for the rules’ function’ (Bozeman, 1993, p. 283). According to Kaufman (1977), the origin of red tape can be found in the attempt to ensure that political authority is not abused and in the try to meet the demands of different citizens and interest groups. In detail, first, red tape results from the efforts to limit the discretion of politicians by means of detailed descriptions and prescriptions. Second, procedural constraints are a response to maintain control over the large number of different stakeholders of public organizations which carry around their individual, likely to be conflicting, sets of values and demands for government activities. Thus, there is reason to assume that conflicting values and procedural constraints correlate. In other words, to the degree that values are clashing, the number of procedural constraints varies.

### *Additional (conflicting) values*

The problem of conflicting values is not exclusively limited to public values. Instead, value conflicts also concern conflicts between public values and other values, such as organizational, professional, personal and cultural values and clashes among those (other) values themselves. The last phenomenon is not unique to the public sector, but can be found in private organizations, too. In this section, first, organizational, professional, cultural and personnel values will be described. Second, some examples of value conflicts (concerning public and other values) will be provided.

Next to public interest and different public values, public servants are also expected to comply with the specific mission of the organization they are working for. According to Weiner (1988), a strong value system is said to exist when members share key values related to acceptable behavior within an organization and the organization’s direction. In this case, economic considerations are likely to play a role, too. One of the most well-known frameworks of *organizational values* is that of Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983). The authors identified three dimensions of organizational

effectiveness. The first value dimension is related to an organizational focus, varying from an internal emphasis on the people in the organization to an external focus of the organization self. The second represents the contrast between stability and control on the one hand and flexibility and change on the other hand. And finally, the last dimension is related to organizational means and end. According to Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983), those organizations that are able to best balance the different value dimensions are also the most effective ones. The relevance of organizational values is reflected in the growing trend of organizations to publish statements of their organizational values (Rainey, 2009).

Second, individuals in public organizations, just like employees in any other professional organization, are also confronted with *professional values*. Andersen (2005) defines professionalism as ‘the degree of co-existence of specialized, theoretical knowledge and professional norms, i.e. prescriptions for acceptable actions under given conditions applying to and sanctioned within a given group’ (p.25). The level of professionalism, or the strength of professional norms, varies among occupations (Van Wart, 1998). Classic examples of occupations with high professional norms are medicine and law. Steen and Van der Meer (2009) also refer to the dimension autonomy in the professionalism construct. According to the authors, high professionalism comes along with a high degree of autonomy which is mainly limited by peer group control.

Third, employees are also influenced by their national and cultural background. According to Williams (1970), *cultural values* represent implicit and/or explicit abstract ideas about what is good, right, and desirable in a society. For example, the way that societal institutions function reflects the cultural value priorities of a nation (Schwartz, 1999). Specifically, in the US, believing in God is a cultural value, while in Western Europe, churches have to fight for their members and citizens easily call themselves atheists. Norris (2003) found that public values differ across the world. For example, depending on the cultural context, different perceptions exist about the role of government, civil servants and citizens in society. As mentioned earlier in this article, public values are regarded to be the building blocks of PSM (Vandenabeele, 2007; Perry & Vandenabeele, 2008). Next to this, they also determine and constrain the opportunities for behavior of a (public service motivated) civil servant, for example by determining how he or she will deal with policy discretion in a specific

situation (Steen & Van Eijk, 2011). Therefore, the cultural context must be considered too while interpreting the meaning of PSM.

Finally, employees carry around their own set of *personal values*. Personal or human values provide somebody's preferences as an individual human being eliminated from the organization she or he works for, and the culture and society she or he lives in. In detail, one can think of socialization from institutions such as family, church, associations, or compulsory education. Personality traits have been found to play a marginal role in the formation of personal values (Gleitman, Fridlund & Reisberg, 2004). Rokeach (1973) differentiates between instrumental and terminal types of personnel values. Examples of instrumental values are ambitious, clean, honest, intellectual and responsible. Freedom, family security, social recognition, and true friendship belong to the list of terminal values.

As mentioned earlier in this article, public values do not only conflict among themselves, but they also clash with organizational, professional, personal and cultural values (which can conflict among themselves, too).

For instance, professional loyalty may displace loyalty to the public and may alienate from politics, or professional self-interest may hamper the ideal of professional responsibility towards higher ethical standards (Le Grand, 2003; Perry, 1997). According to Van Wart (1998), through the use of exclusive rights, professionals set their own standards, regulate the members of their occupational area, and insulate themselves from democratic control. Next to this, Perry (1997) found that professional identification had no overall positive effect on PSM. Only two out of four dimensions of PSM had a positive relationship with professional identity (public interest and self-sacrifice). The third dimension (attraction to policy making) had a negative relationship with professionalism, and there was no relationship with the fourth dimension (compassion).

Romzek and Hendricks (1982) point out that a conflict may arise between an employee's commitment to the organization on the one hand, and specific public interest on the other hand. This idea is supported by Steen and Rutgers (2011) who suggest that a conflict between an organizational and an extra-organizational focus may be the source of frustration and disappointment that in turn results in moral dilemmas or even negative behaviors.

Lipsky's (1980) classic description of discretion of street level bureaucrats refers to professionals in public services not only holding high levels of discretion, but often performing contrary to organizational rules and goals. Civil servants encounter conflicts as they seek for their organizational life to be more consistent with their own preferences, commitments, and their conception of the potential of their work for being socially useful (p. xii). Lipsky also points at the interest differences between street level bureaucrats and higher management levels, e.g. the first being focused on processing work load while the latter are interested in achieving results consistent with agency objectives (p.18). Also, professionals may experience conflicts between their professional concern for the (individual) client on the one hand, and the general social role of the agency or the need of the organization to process work quickly using the resources available on the other hand (p.41-45).

However, there are also authors who claim that a conflict is not the necessary consequence of clashing values. According to Vandenabeele, Scheepers and Hondegem (2006), when personal and organizational interests are in competition with the public interest, 'the public interest should prevail' (assuming that the individual is highly public service motivated) (p. 14). Others authors claim that for some professionals, professional commitment is positively related to organizational commitment. For instance, in an empirical study during the Reagan area, Golden (2000) found that public servants regarded it as their professional obligation to discharge certain policies effectively, even though they disagreed with them from a professional point of view.

In sum, while value conflicts may arise in all kind of work contexts, a higher level of red tape and the tendency of public values to be conflicting are distinctive features of public service organizations. In the next section, these findings are combined with insights from psychological theories on motivation to theoretically describe the expression of PSM in a more elaborated way.

## **6. Introducing a new model explaining the PSM-performance relationship based on motivational theories**

Theoretically, the goal-setting theory (GST) and the theory on person-organization fit (P-O fit) provide psychological insights for a new model explaining the impact of situational circumstances on the expression of PSM.

There is a growing consensus that any model of work motivation should include the underlying process variables that explain how goals affect work motivation (Latham, Borgogni & Pettita, 2008; Locke & Latham, 1990; Mitchell, 1997; Wright, 2001; Wright, 2004). Also from an empirical point of view, the GST has been very successful in that it has been solidly confirmed by well designed research (Latham 2007; Miner, 2005; Mitchell & Daniels, 2003).

Central to the theory is the idea that the *content of the goal* (goal difficulty and goal specificity) and the *commitment to the goal* (enhanced through self-efficacy and the value component of the goal) influence individual behavior and performance.

Specific goals enhance performance through four goal mechanisms: 1) directive function; 2) mobilizing function; 3) increasing persistence; 4) motivation the discovery and use of task-relevant knowledge and strategies (Perry & Vandenabeele, 2008). In contrast, ambiguous goals weaken the goal-performance relationship because of the difficulty to see the effects of the own work efforts (Brewer & Selden, 2000; Locke & Latham, 1990; Perry, 2000; Rainey, 1983).

Goal difficulty has a curvilinear effect on performance (Wright, 2001). According to Wright (2001), goals act as standards for self-evaluation and -satisfaction. For this reason, difficult goals require more effort to maintain a positive self-evaluation that drives individuals (Bandura, 1986). Controversy, if goals are too difficult little effort might be expected since reaching these goals might be appraised as impossible.

In order for a goal to be motivating, it not only needs to be specific and moderately difficult, but an individual also must have it and needs to be *committed* to it (Locke & Latham 1990).

Although pure participation in setting a goal does not enhance commitment to it, expected success in reaching the goal - in other words, a sense of self-efficacy - does so (Rainey, 2009). According to Bandura (1986), individuals who believe that they can accomplish a goal are more likely to expend the necessary effort and persist in the face of obstacles. This argument is empirically supported by Frayne and Latham (1987) and Latham and Frayne (1989) who were able to demonstrate that enhancing public employees' self-efficacy to overcome obstacles increased job attendance. Based upon these this description, the first hypothesis is stated:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between self-efficiency and behavior.*

According to Wright (2001), self-efficiency is influenced by goal difficulty and procedural constraints. If employees are confronted with multiple, conflicting values, their self-efficiency is likely to decrease because goals achievement might be seen as severely limited (Wright, 2001). Similarly, Bandura and Wood (1989) found that managers who perceived their organization as controllable – thus were not confronted with difficult and ambiguous, but with specific goals - displayed a higher sense of self-efficiency and even set higher personal goals. In line with this, it can be argued that an environment, characterized by a high degree of congruence between different types of values, may have a positive impact on employees' self-efficiency since the demands on employees are clear, which in turn increases goal achievement. This leads to the following hypotheses:

*H2a: There is a negative relationship between the two concepts procedural constraints and conflicting (public) values and self-efficiency.*

*H2b: There is a positive relationship between the two concept goal specificity and value congruence and self-efficiency.*

Moreover, Buchanan (1974, 1975) and Wright (2004) were able to demonstrate that procedural constraints frustrate employees' motivation to contribute to the social mission with which they identify. Other studies report that conflicting values have a negative impact on employee's performance. For example, Vinzant (1989) found that highly public service motivated employees were dissatisfied with their jobs, because they perceived their job as not serving the public. More recently, Steen and Rutgers (2011) proposed that a conflict between public interest and organizational focus may result in dissatisfaction of highly public service motivated employees, their tendency to leave the organization or engage in dissenting behaviors, such as whistle-blowing or other forms of principled organizational dissent. This suggests that individuals scoring high on PSM are not automatically more satisfied (and in turn perform better) than lowly public service motivated employees. Instead, it can be assumed that the relationship between PSM and behavior is intervened by value conflicts and procedural constraints. Similarly, Locke & Latham (1990, 2002) were able to demonstrate that specific goals consistently lead to higher performance by reducing the ambiguity about what is to be attained. In another study involving students

carrying out fund-raising activities for scholarships, Grant (2008) reported that students performed much better when they had specific information about students who had benefitted from the scholarship program in the past. Again, these studies argue for the necessity to consider the situational circumstances when analyzing the relationship between motivation and behavior. For this reason, it is expected:

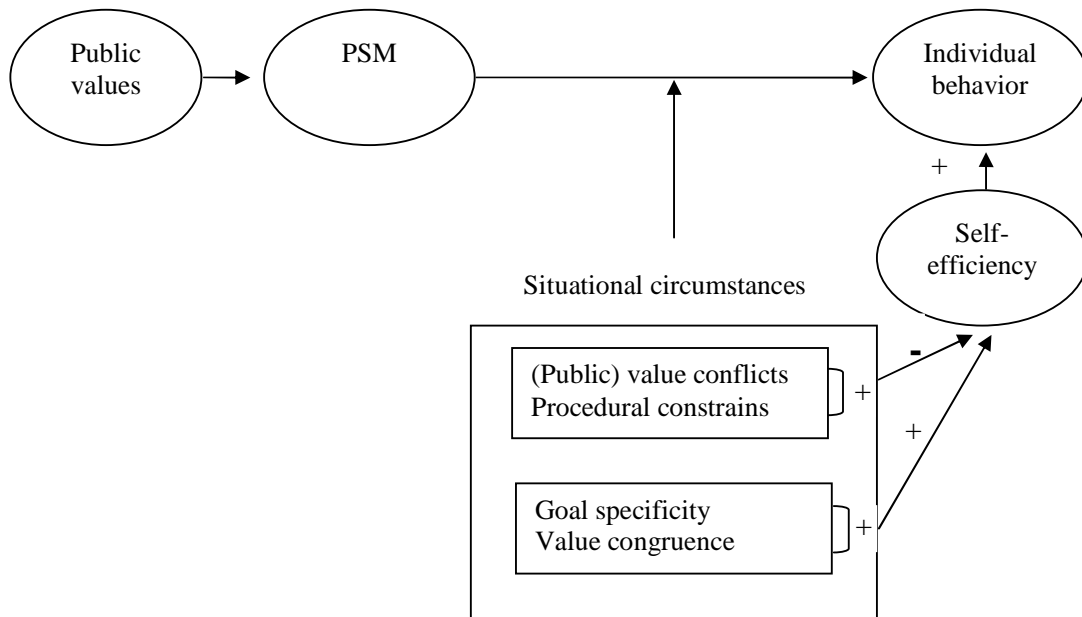
*H3: The relationship between PSM and behavior is moderated by procedural constraints, conflicting (public) values and specific goals.*

Next to self-efficiency, commitment to the goal also increases as the value of the goal increases (Rainey, 2009). Employees are expected to expend greater effort towards achieving performance goals as they believe that these will result in important outcomes (Locke & Latham, 1990; Wright, 2001; Boardman & Sundquest, 2008). Therefore, it can be argued that a high degree of congruence between public and other values (professional, cultural, and organizational) may have a positive effect on employee's behavior. This idea is supported by literature on Person-Organization fit (P-O fit).

The P-O fit belongs to one of the most popular areas of research in the field of general management and organizational behavior (Bright, 2007). According to Kristof (1996), it can be defined 'as the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: a) at least one entity provides what the other needs [supplementary fit], or b) they share similar fundamental characteristics [complementary fit], or c) both' (p. 4-5). Central to the P-O fit is the idea that positive responses will occur when individuals match the context. In detail, several studies demonstrate that depending on the fit between personal and organizational values, employees are more committed to the organization and that they score higher on work satisfaction (O'Reilly, Chantman & Caldwell, 1991; Romzek 1990). This is consistent with the work of Leisink and Steijn (2009) who found that a misfit between public interest commitment and one's job providing an opportunity to exercise this commitment had a clearly negative effect on job performance. Moreover, Bright (2007) demonstrated that PSM has no significant relationship with the behavior of public employees when controlling for the P-O fit. In detail, the author found that the effect of PSM on job satisfaction and turnover was intervened by value congruence between employees and their employing organization. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

*H4: The relationship between PSM and behavior is moderated by value congruence.*

In conclusion, P-O fit and GST provide theoretical insights that explain the effect of contextual factors on the expression of PSM through the sense of self-efficiency and the value-component of the goal. These theories imply that there may be many daily working situations where the PSM of public servants is ‘over-ruled’ by other values that are more pertinent at the given point of time, or intensified in the case of value congruence and specific goals. As a result, even highly public service motivated individuals might behave differently from what we expect to be public service related behavior. (For a schematic overview of the theoretical insights applied to the PSM-behavior relationship, see Figure 1.)



**Figure 1** The Relationship between PSM and Behavior Moderated by Situational Circumstances

## 7. Illustrating the new model by means of a practical case

In the final section of this paper, the model described above is illustrated by means of a practical case, namely the case of the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (Voedsel en Waren Autoriteit, VWA).



The VWA provides a unique employment situation in the public sector in the Netherlands. Next to the regular veterinarian-inspectors, it also employs a large number of so-called ‘practitioners’ who have two places of employment. They work for the Dutch inspection services VWA, while at the same time also hold a position as independent veterinarians in private practices. Consequentially, practitioners are confronted with even more conflicting demands than their ‘purely public’ counterparts. Both types of employees experience the demand to comply with the public interest (given that the VWA is a public organization), their personal, professional and cultural values, and the specific mission of the VWA (which is the protection of human and animal health and the monitoring of food and consumer products<sup>2</sup>). However, it is only the practitioners that have to handle additional organizational values of their private practices.

Even though this is not the formal procedure, for practical reasons practitioners (which are paid per hour) may enter situations where they have to control farmers on behalf of the VWA, which they also might know as paying customers. Moreover, in consideration of their background, one can assume that practitioners are more closely committed to farmers and are more highly sensitive to the consequences that come along with negative test results, such as reputational and financial damages than veterinarian-inspectors. In these situations, the specific mission of the VWA potentially clashes with the organizational mission of the own, private practice. On the one hand the VWA’s mission demands from practitioner to carry out controls very carefully (in order to guarantee the protection of human and animal health and the monitoring of food and consumer products), while on the other hand economic considerations play an important role for holders of private practices, too. After all, exhaustive controlling is a time consuming activity and might affect the relationship with the farmer negatively.

Applying the case of the VWA to the theoretical model outlined in the previous section, it can be expected that the two diverse types of employees of the Dutch inspection service, namely (highly public service) practitioners and (highly public service) veterinarian-inspectors behave differently in the same situation because the former ones are more troubled by value conflicts (which are theorized to moderate the relationship between PSM and behavior) than the latter ones. Nevertheless, we need

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved June 30, 2011 from <https://www.vwa.nl>

be aware of the fact that full-time veterinarian-inspectors are confronted with value conflicts, too. For example, the outburst of an animal disease might require both, the practitioner and the veterinarian-inspector, to slaughter a healthy livestock in order to attain the organizational mission of preserving the safety of the food chain. Yet, this may clash with the professional ethos of the employees directed to protect animal health, fair treatment, and the economic concerns of the farmers inspected who find their lifelong animal nursery project wiped out.

## **8. Conclusion**

This new model, based on the combination of psychological insights from motivational theories with literature on conflicting values, clearly suggests that any study addressing relationship between PSM and behavior should include situational circumstances. While studies on PSM traditionally focus on the direct relationship between PSM and (individual or organizational) performance, we focus on contextual factors – more specifically values conflicts and to a lesser degree procedural constraints – influencing this relationship. Even though much empirical research needs to be done to verify the theoretical model outlined in this article, it has significant research implications. In following up studies it would be very interesting to identify situations where employees experience intense (public) value conflicts.

In addition, these findings suggest that the benefit of manipulating PSM through personnel politics is questionable. It would be highly useful to learn not only how the enactment of PSM is influenced by contextual factors, but also to learn more about the degree of influence personnel politics have on situational circumstances (such as values congruence, goals specificity, value conflicts, procedural constraints).

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